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4-25-2019

ENNC-3850

Word Count: 3025

The Time Machine: The Future as Fiction of Empire

The British Empire reached the heights of its worldly influence culturally and economically in the late nineteenth century. Alongside this large global presence came many concerns and anxieties about itself that the general population reflected. These anxieties have now come to be part of the broader conception of Fiction of Empire which explores the British Empire in the late nineteenth century, its worldly influence, use of the frontier, and the issues that arise from it. In the novel *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells, the anxieties and concerns of the loss of manliness, the eventual obsolescence and downfall of the empire, miscegenation, and loss of self are explored via a narrator recounting the Time Traveller's journey to "the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand Seven Hundred and One."[1]

During the late nineteenth century there began to arise many worries about manliness and masculinity in the British Empire. This concern arose from the increasingly domestic lifestyle that was developing from many modern inventions and conveniences. However, there was the idea that the frontier would allow for one to escape back to a time of old where manliness and heroism could be recaptured. Wells taps into this idea within the novel, and uses the future as and alternate and ultimate frontier setting. To the Time Traveller, the future is an entirely new land of experiences that can't be replicated or experienced anywhere else. One of his first concerns

[1] "Chapter 4." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 34.

during the start of his travel is if "the [human] race had lost its manliness and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful."[2] This is the first concern over the loss of manliness raised during his travels. In the future, the Time Traveller meets strange inhabitants known as the Eloi. These inhabitants are revealed to be descendents of humans. From their first appearance, the Eloi are described as "a very beautiful and graceful creature, but indescribably frail," thus personifying the fear of loss of manliness.[3] Even more, the Time Traveller negatively associates their bodies with the "girlish rotundity" indicating a further loss of manliness as they have become more feminine.[4] Their "intellectual level [as] one of our five-year-old children" from his own time is also noted.[5] This is further emphasized as he "felt like a schoolmaster amidst children" when interacting with them.[6] Such a view helps to show the lacking mental and physical development of the Eloi, thus further exemplifying them as non-masculine. Beyond their mental shortcomings and weak bodies, their fruit only diet raises concerns over manliness as well. In eating only fruit the Eloi have become fruitarian, and thus cast off meat as a result. The conception of "red meat is an archetypical masculine food" for humanity, and the removal of it from the Eloi's diet shows a deep disassociation with manliness.[7] Even more, the attributes of "[s]trength and power emerge as attributes associated with meat," thus suggesting that the Eloi have lost these traits by becoming fruitarian.[8] By highlighting these connotations, it can be seen that Wells removes masculinity from the Eloi. This reflects the fear

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[2] "Chapter 3." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp. 26.
[3] Ibid, 27
[4] "Chapter 4." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 34.
[5] "Chapter 3." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 29.
[6] "Chapter 4." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 33.
[7] Paul Rozin, Julia M. Hormes, Myles S. Faith, Brian Wansink, Is Meat Male? A Quantitative Multimethod Framework to Establish Metaphoric Relationships, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 39, Issue 3, 1 October 2012, Pages 629–643, https://doi.org/10.1086/664970
[8] Ibid

that humanity will lose its manliness permanently over time. The traditional native often found in Fiction of Empire stories is partially replaced by the Eloi species.

The Eloi portray stereotypes of natives as they are mostly lazy creatures and just spend their days "playing gently, [or] bathing in the river, in making love in a half-playful fashion, in eating fruit and sleeping."[9] They have a foreign language noted as "excessively simple," and with "little use of figurative language."[10] The Eloi are also given a more sympathetic portrayal of natives due to the Time Traveller's relationship concerning Weena. Weena is an Eloi native that the Time Traveller befriends after saving her from drowning. Following this rescue, the two spend ample amounts of time together through the near entirety of the Time Traveller's remaining time in the future. Their relationship, while purely platonic in the course of the story, alludes to deeper levels of intimacy. Such fondness and hints of intimacy can be seen in how the Time Traveller views Weena as "more human than she was" which is "perhaps because her affection was so human."[11] Weena also slept "with her head pillowed" on the Time Traveller.[12] The mere act of resting with the Time Traveller shows a basic level of intimacy, but their relationship is more than that as revealed later. Their relationship hints at the theme of miscegenation that often arises in Fiction of Empire tales. It is considered wrong for a European and a native to cohabitate or fall in love due to the impure view of natives. Wells attempts to break this rule by having Weena be the Time Traveller's close friend, noting that Weena "was exactly like a child," thus further solidifying a platonic relationship.[13] The Time Traveller even decides to take Weena "with [him] to [his] own time" once he regains access to his time

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[9] "Chapter 5." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 50.
[10] Ibid, 47
[11] "Chapter 8." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 77.
[12] "Chapter 5." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 53.
[13] Ibid, 51

machine.[14] While not with romantic intent, the Time Traveller deciding to do this at all hints at the ideas of miscegenation. However, Wells doesn't allow this to happen as Weena dies while she accompanies the Time Traveller on his quest for his time machine. In killing off Weena through a forest fire, Wells reinforces the idea that miscegenation is wrong, and there can not be a true love between native peoples and European colonizers. The death of Weena causes the Time Traveller to feel "the intensest wretchedness" and "absolutely lonely again", thus allowing the character to feel emotion on account of native relationships.[15] Though for all of the positives that come with Weena and the Eloi, Wells still swings the other way to negatively portray natives through the Morlocks.

Wells portrays the Morlocks, the other descendent of humans, as stereotypical natives by being a more literal representation of the savageness that is often mapped onto native populations. They have a more animalistic appearance noted as being "a queer little ape-like figure" that was "like a human spider" with "a dull white" skin tone, and "large greyish-red eyes."[16] This description creates an off putting sensation, and suggests that the Morlocks are others that can't possibly be civilized in any form. This is reinforced as the Time Traveller notes "how nauseatingly inhuman they looked."[17] This acts as a form of physically disconnecting them from the Eloi as the Time Traveller notes that "[m]an had not remained one species."[18] He surmises that this arose from a "social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer," thus indicating a deeper commentary on class divides.[19] That divergence lead to the Morlocks

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[14] "Chapter 7." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 76.
[15] "Chapter 9." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 92.
[16] Ibid, 55-56
[17] "Chapter 6." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 67.
[18] "Chapter 5." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 56.
[19] Ibid, 58

dwelling underground while the Eloi stayed above ground. This division lead to the upper world people, Eloi, "pursuing please and comfort and beauty."[20] Such a change explains the way that the "degeneration, to a general dwindling in size, strength and intelligence" happened to the Eloi people.[21]

The Morlocks also serve as drivers of conflict in the story by moving the Time Traveller's time machine behind a wall. This conveys the idea of a sealed room, where the British see themselves as isolated due to their island status, but are actually vulnerable. It works in the context of the story so well by being a literal vulnerability for the Time Traveller as he is unable to return to his own time, and thus becomes a vulnerable man displaced out of time. This displacement requires the Time Traveller to adapt in order to survive the trying experiences he faces since "[s]trength is the outcome of need."[22] This trying experience allows the Time Traveller to embody the ultimate European on the frontier as he must utilize reason , science, and technology to learn about and adapt to this symbolic and futuristic frontier. The reaffirms the idea that Europeans are better inclined to rule over native lands and peoples due to their ability to use science and critically think. One of the ways that the Time Traveller utilizes these skills is by using matches as "defences against the Morlocks".[23] This use of matches is notable as the "[t]he art of fire-making" disappeared from the future amongst the Eloi and Morlocks.[24] In rekindling this art, the Time Traveller exhibits his dominance and skills as a civilized man, and reinforces his claim to dominance. Even more, the whole advent of the Time Traveller's being in the future is predicated on his ability to construct a working time machine, and thus being able to properly

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[20] Ibid, 59
[21] Ibid, 60
[22] "Chapter 4." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 36.
[23] "Chapter 8." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 84.
[24] "Chapter 9." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 86.

harness science. Even more after arriving in the future the Time Traveller "unscrewed the little levers" to stop his machine from working, thus showing his foresight in realizing that something might happen to his machine in his absence as he explores his surroundings.[25] These occurrences work to further solidify him as a model European in the vein of science and reason. However, there were negative worries over science during this time, especially concerning Darwin.

In the course of Fiction of Empire, there are lots worries and anxieties over natural selection arising over Darwin's findings being published at the time. The Time Traveller maps these concerns onto the Eloi and the Morlocks. Wells uses the Morlocks to show the validity of natural selection as the physically dominant Morlocks survive. However, he also uses the Eloi to cast doubts about natural selection. The Time Traveller does this by not understanding how the Eloi could still exist in this far off time due to their docile and simple nature. Though he later comes to learn that the Eloi have a deeper role by being "mere fatted cattle, which the ant-like Morlocks preserved and preyed upon."[26] By essentially being cattle, Wells reinforces the Eloi's role as the physical embodiment of lost manliness due to their not having any physical resistance toward the ranching. Moreso, it uses the Morlocks as a way of conveying savagery and the idea of going native. This partially comes about by having Morlocks be a pseudo-form of cannibals as they eat the Eloi, who share a common ancestor. Even more their savageness is conveyed by the Time Traveller's assumption that the Morlocks "lived on rats and such-like vermin" prior to hunting the Eloi, thus showing the low gross levels they seep to that a civilized English man would never do.[27] All of this is in contrast to the contemporary view of the late nineteenth

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[25] "Chapter 4." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 28.
[26] "Chapter 7." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 75.
[27] Ibid

century where there was "prejudice against human flesh" for the civilized man.[28] The Morlock's ultimate fate works to suggest that humanity will go native over the long course of time, and that civil society will all be for naught. This essentially nullifies and defeats Britain's idea that its colonistic ways will help make the world a better place as the world's ultimate fate is a vast native fate. It also reflects the deeper concerns and anxieties over the fall of the British Empire.

One common fear often shown in Fiction of Empire is that of the empire falling from its high and mighty place as the dominant world power. This fear manifests itself in the empire losing influence, being taken down internally through its populous' own loss of self, or the invasion of the homeland. The concerns about the homefront are all covered by the Time Traveller's journey to the future, and begin by his actual travels. When time travelling, the Time Traveller only moves through the dimension of time and not space. This is important as his travels keep him in the exact same location in space, thus revealing that he is still in London. The entire world that he explores is that of a ruined London, which shows the realization of the British homeland falling. This idea becomes even more relatable since the Time Traveller is in the same place where his own house once stood, thus essentially standing upon the ruins of his home. This location is later confirmed by the Time Traveller as he notes that his machine "had started from the south-east corner of the laboratory," but "had come to rest again in the north-west." after he arrives back to the past.[29] This was caused by the Morlock's moving the machine, and confirms the way in which time is not a physical movement. The other parts of the land that the Time Traveller explores are all ruins of London. While wandering about the area the Time Traveller notes that "[t]he house and the cottage, which form such characteristic features of

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[28] Ibid

[29] "Chapter 12." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 105.

our own English landscape, had disappeared."[30] This reflects the deeper anxieties of the loss of the British homeland at the time. The Time Traveller also finds "big palaces" that were used as "mere living places, great dining-halls and sleeping apartments" by the Eloi.[31] This great palace can be assumed to have once belonged to the royal family, and is now just used with indifference by the simple and naive Eloi. Such a fate for the palace is one that once again shows an ultimate fate to the British homeland as nothing spectacular, and thus reflects their deeper anxiety. At one point, the Time Traveller stands "among the ruins of some latter-day South Kensington" in a museum, thus further bringing the homeland to the front of his experiences.[32] His familiarity with the land is further indicated by the observation of the Thames River, and how it "had shifted perhaps a mile from its present position."[33] All of these occurrences then beg the question of how England became the way it did, to which the Time Traveller finds no answers. The anxieties of the British Empire falling are on full display here amongst the ruined homes, shifting landscapes, and no discernable traces of British culture. Even more, there is a representation of homeland invasion by other cultures as the Time Traveler encounters a" White Sphinx upon [a] pedestal of bronze."[34] He also encounters a "Palace of Green Porcelain" which is amongst the British landscape in a foreign feeling way.[35] Each of these things come from foreign nations' architectural styles, thus suggesting there had been some form of foreign influence over the British homeland. This follows the idea of the British homeland being invaded, and losing its own sense of self. More deeply, the Time Traveller ponders on the fall of man and civilization as

30 "Chapter 4." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 34.
31 "Chapter 5." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 50.
32 "Chapter 8." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 78.
33 "Chapter 4." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 33.
34 "Chapter 5." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 41.
35 "Chapter 8." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 77.

he notices that "the nations, languages, literatures, aspirations, even the mere memory of Man as I knew him, had been swept out of existence."[36] This gets to the deeper issue of how the Time Traveller was changed by his travels to the future.

The future quite obviously changes the Time Traveller over the course of his journey. The Time Traveller's change is evident immediately upon his return from the future, which takes place prior to telling his story to the narrator. His appearance shows the wear and tear of travels as his hair is "greyer--either with dust and dirt or because its colour had actually faded."[37] This shows the ways in which journeying to the frontier can be a physical drain on someone instead of a revitalization of their inner manliness and physical prowess. Even more, he is seen as walking "with just such a limp" that helps to give yet another way that the Time Traveller a physical change following his journey. While these are physical traits, they work to serve as a deeper embodiment of the changes that he went through on his journey. This backs up the ways that the frontier works as something that can cause negative change too. Upon his initial arrival in the future, he worries about "[t]he possibility of losing [his] own age."[38] This serves as yet another way in which Wells explores that idea of lost self that can happen on the frontier, and is the first hint in the Time Traveller's story about his eventual loss of self. His change is evident to all those who attend his party as the Time Traveller pontificates on how "life is a dream, a precious poor dream at times."[39] This is a direct expression of the disillusionment that the Time Traveller faces after his trying journey. He now sees life as something more mystical after facing trying challenges. Even more, his disillusionment can be seen in a larger context by the Time Traveller

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36 "Chapter 7." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 74.
37 "Chapter 2." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 16.
38 "Chapter 5." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 41.
39 "Chapter 12." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 107.

reflecting on all the years he "spent in study and toil to get into the future age, and now [his] passion of anxiety to get out of it." while he is still in the future.[40] The ultimate end of the Time Traveller is left ambiguous as he takes the time machine for one last spin, and the narrator notes that his writing happens after the "Time Traveller vanished three years ago."[41] Though prior to this he notes seeing the Time Traveller one last time as he was sitting in his time machine looking like "a ghostly, indistinct figure sitting in a whirling mass of black and brass."[42] Such a final description of what is seen helps to perfectly encapsulate the ways in which the frontier changes people. The Time Traveller had become someone who was like a phantasm, endlessly lost within a mass where it was fully unknown if he was him or not, especially to himself. The frontier was often seen as just a way to fix the problems of the ordinary and mundane life of people who lived in the domestic british sphere.

During the late nineteenth century there were many novels that reflected the life of mainstream British citizens. However, there was a subsection that developed now referred to as Fiction of Empire that dove into the anxieties and fears that the Empire felt at the time. It challenged the myths of the Empire, yet also fully explored them. In H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine,* the themes of lost manliness, going native, miscegenation, and the loss of self and the Empire at home and abroad were all covered. The themes that Wells covers help to encapsulate the entirety of Fiction of Empire, and he leaves the narrator, essentially the reader's surrogate, wondering if the time machine itself is a "foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end" as a deeper metaphor to the relation of the end of mankind.[43]

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40 "Chapter 5." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 47.
41 "Chapter 12." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 110.
42 "Chapter 12." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 109.
43 "Epilogue." The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells, Minerva Publishing, 2019, pp 111.

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